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Reagan Stand Criticized by Lawmakers

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 14 — President Reagan's defense of the White House's secret policy of conducting talks and sending military equipment to Iran continued to draw criticism today from both Republicans and Democrats.

The Senate majority leader, Bob Dole, Republican of Kansas, in his first comment since Mr. Reagan's revelations, said that although the policy was "well motivated," it was "a little inept."

He said the President's policy had produced "a lot of doubt" that the United States was sticking to its anti-terrorist policy.

But even as Mr. Reagan again justified the clandestine Iran operation, his chief of staff, Donald T. Regan, said he believed it would not be resumed.

"Since this story has received so much publicity that this avenue to trying to establish relationships with them may have been blocked for a while," he said, "and unfortunately, that will also have some repercussions in our efforts to get the hostages out."

Repeats His Theme

Repeating the theme of his speech Thursday night, Mr. Reagan said again today that he had not paid "any ransom" to terrorists to get back the three hostages freed during the 18 months the secret Iran operation was in effect. He said the release of the hostages was "a bonus" that resulted from the improved climate in Iran-American relations he said the secret contacts had created.

In remarks at the White House to supporters of charitable causes, Mr. Reagan predicted that "now that the veil of secrecy has been lifted, the unfounded rumors laid to rest, I think most Americans will approve of our efforts to better relations between our countries and rejoice that it has resulted in the freeing of some of our fellow citizens."

The White House announced today that Mr. Reagan would hold a news conference next Wednesday at 8 P.M., Eastern standard time. It will be his first news conference in three months.

The White House said that after the President's speech Thursday night, there were 1,559 telephone calls, of which 1,133 were positive and 426 negative. Virtually every Presidential speech is followed by many supportive phone calls to the White House, a White House aide said.

Congress in Recess

Criticism continued on Capitol Hill, however, even though most members of Congress are on vacation. The overriding theme of the comments was that despite Mr. Reagan's denial, the President had, in fact, violated his own principles against bargaining for the release of hostages and had approved more than 100 tons of military equipment for Iran despite a public posture of trying to block such shipments.

Meanwhile, officials at the State Department said they remained troubled by the Iranian operation in which they were deliberately excluded by the White House. Secretary of State George P. Shultz had opposed the policy, as had Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger, the White House said.

But Larry Speakes, the White House spokesman, disclosed that the Central Intelligence Agency had participated in the clandestine operation.

Department officials were charged with explaining the Iran policy to the Iraq embassy today, and to other Middle Eastern nations. Their instructions were to adhere closely to what Mr. Reagan said Thursday night.

Mr. Speakes became engaged in heated exchanges with reporters who questioned the credibility of statements made by Mr. Reagan and other officials.

At one point, Mr. Speakes challenged reporters to let the American people decide whether Mr. Reagan had damaged American credibility by authorizing the arms shipments.

To help turn opinion in the President's favor, those involved in the secret Iran operation held a series of briefings for reporters and columnists and appeared repeatedly on broadcast interview shows. These included Mr. Regan; Vice Adm. John M. Poindexter, the national security adviser, and Robert C. McFarlane, the former national security adviser who traveled to Iran last May along with Lieut. Col. Oliver North of the White House staff, for talks with Iranian officials.

Some Officials Absent

Conspicuously absent from any briefings were any State Department officials.

A senior White House official said that Mr. Shultz did not know that Mr. McFarlane was in Iran in May.

Mr. Regan, in a breakfast meeting with some reporters, said the Iranian side had demanded that the United States provide specific spare parts and defensive arms as a show of "good faith" to demonstrate that the American officials spoke with the authority of Mr. Reagan. He said the President agreed to send "a minimum amount" of arms and the United States asked, as a good faith gesture in return, that the Iranians with whom it was dealing, use their influence to free the hostages.

When reporters said that this had all the appearances of a swap, Mr. Regan exploded:

"We're being scorned for this. What is a human life worth? If you're taken, one of your relatives taken, what would you have us do, sit as the head of the Government of the United States and say look you took an American hostage, and we won't even talk to you? What are we supposed to do?"

"The President is a man of compassion," Mr. Regan went on. "He is sitting there. You have Peggy Say, all of the family saying, please Mr. President, you've got to do something. We're branded as being callous. We don't give a darn about those hostages. We're not working to get the hostages out. But when you try to do something to get the hostages out, you're swapping human flesh, you're indulging in some nefarious practice. I ask you, think it through. What would you have us do were you in our position?"

Senator Patrick Leahy, Democrat of Vermont, vice chairman of the Select Committee on Intelligence, criticized the fact that the Iran operation "seems to have been operated out of the basement of the White House" with the State Department "cut out."

Senator Joseph R. Biden Jr., Democrat of Delaware, said Mr. Reagan's comments "underscored how amateurish this thing has been."

Senator Pete Wilson, Republican of California, criticized the sale of weapons to Iran. He said, "Personally, I think they should have chosen some other means, like medical supplies."